

## NEW JERSEY

2000-2001

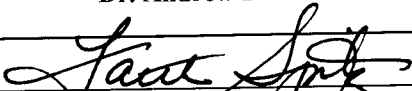
## Guidelines and Application

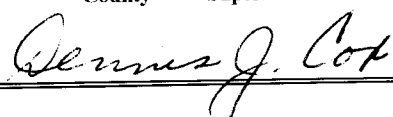
STAR

## SCHOOLS

**Deadline for Application to County Office:  
NOVEMBER 27, 2000**

The Star School application is a public document. The information that you provide will serve as the official record. Review the application prior to submission to ensure accuracy and adherence to the guidelines. Type or keyboard information requested on this page

County	Hunterdon
District (Proper Name)	Readington Township
Address	P.O. Box 700 Street/P. O. Box City Whitehouse Zip Code 08889
Telephone	Fax 908 534 6802 Email fspitz@readington.k12.nj.us
Chief School Administrator	Dr. Faith Spitz
Nominated School (Proper Name)	Readington Middle School
Address	P.O. Box 700 Street/P. O. Box Whitehouse 08691 City Zip Code
Telephone	908 534-6802 Email arinko@readington.K12.nj.us
Principal	Dr. Andrew Rinko
Chief School Administrator's or Charter School Lead Person's Signature	

FOR USE BY COUNTY SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS ONLY			
Approved: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No	County	Superintendent's	Signature
			

NEW JERSEY  
**STAR SCHOOLS**  
2000-2001 APPLICATION

**RESPONSES to the information below and the statements must be ANONYMOUS.** No reference should be made to the names of the district, the school or the community. Use the words "the school" in referring to the applicant in the responses to the statements.

The following data is required to assist the panelists in the evaluation of the application:		
<b>Type of School</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Elementary School <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <b>Middle School</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Junior High School <input type="checkbox"/> High School <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____	<b>Grade Levels</b> <div style="text-align: center; border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100px; margin: 0 auto;">6-8</div>	<b>School Enrollment    643</b>  <b>Name of the School's Specialization or Whole-School Reform Model</b> <div style="text-align: center; border-bottom: 1px solid black; width: 100%;"><b>Active Learning</b></div>
<b>Location:</b> <input type="checkbox"/> Urban/city; <input type="checkbox"/> Suburban with urban characteristics; <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Suburban; <input type="checkbox"/> Small City/Town; <input type="checkbox"/> Rural		
<b>Previous Star School:</b> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> <b>No</b> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, Year(s) _____		

**KEYBOARDED RESPONSES** to the statements below must be **no more than a total of five pages.** Keyboard the statement followed by the response.

1. Describe the school's specialization or whole-school reform model and its objectives, the student educational needs and the specific *Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards,\** that it addresses. Detail how it promotes high student achievement and contributes to school-wide accomplishments.
2. Describe the professional development activities and research of the school's faculty. Detail to what extent these activities contribute to exemplary teaching practices in their classrooms. Explain the link between these activities and the specialization or whole-school reform model.
3. Describe the leadership style of the school's administration and how the management and educational program demonstrate administrative and fiscal efficiency. Describe any innovative scheduling and/or management strategies implemented.
4. Describe the school's overall approach to assessment. How are your methods aligned to the specialization or whole-school reform model? How are you ensuring that the content you are measuring is consistent with the *Core Curriculum Content Standards*? Provide student performance data for the school years 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 using state tests and, if you wish, national and/or district standardized norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, and/or alternative assessments. Explain any dramatic increase or decrease. Specify which groups, if any, are excluded from the assessments for which you provide data. Give the percentage of students excluded. You may use a chart.
5. Describe collaborative efforts with families, business, the community, school districts, and/or higher education that contribute to a school environment governed by the students' needs and promoting high student achievement.
6. **Previous Star School Winners Only:** Provide a one-page addendum to your application that describes efforts to expand or replicate the specialization or whole-school reform model within the school and/or the district. Have there been dissemination activities beyond the school or district? If so, please elaborate.

\*The May 1996 edition of the *Core Curriculum Content Standards* published by the New Jersey State Department of Education was disseminated to all districts and charter schools and is available on line through the department's website at <http://www.state.nj.us/education>.  
6appss.20

1. Describe the school's specialization or whole-school reform model and its objectives, the students' educational needs and the specific **Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards,\*** that it addresses. Detail how it promotes high student achievement and contributes to school-wide accomplishments.

### Star Schools Introduction

***"Learning is not a spectator sport. Students do not learn much just sitting in classes listening to teachers, memorizing prepackaged assignments, and spitting out answers. They must talk about what they are learning, write reflectively about it, relate it to past experiences, and apply it to their daily lives. They must make what they learn part of themselves" (Chickering & Gamson, 1987).***

As a "leading edge" middle school, we are dedicated to an educational environment that empowers students through *active learning*. Active learning is defined as any strategy "that involves students in doing things and thinking about the things they are doing" (Bonwell, C., & Eison, J., 1991). In our school, active learning includes the range of teaching and learning activities that challenge all students in

- well structured question and answer sessions
- paired activities
- case studies
- individual and group project-based assignments
- student research
- practicum experiences
- clinical studies
- collaborative learning
- cooperative learning
- team learning
- problem-based learning

Guided by the findings of the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, The National Middle School Association, and the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content and Cross-Content Workplace Readiness Standards, our school uses active learning strategies to develop lifelong learners who are critical thinkers, school leaders, and community-minded citizens.

From the very first day that our students arrive in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, we challenge them beyond literal-level thinking, stretching their cognitive imaginations through the analysis of problems and issues, by examining the component parts, and then integrating them into solutions with new approaches (**Cross Content WPR Standard 3**). The following examples are only snapshots of the overall impact of active learning.

Sixth grade students participate in an elaborate study of the Wisconsin Fast Plants (**Science Standard 5.2**) by constructing hypotheses, designing experiments, controlling variables, interpreting data, and drawing conclusions. In seventh grade, the medieval times are explored through a cross-curricular study culminating in an integrated research paper and a technology rich multi-media presentation. By eighth grade, students are able to apply their critical thinking skills in a variety of settings: interactive Holocaust studies (**Social Studies Standard 6.3**), science probe applications (**Science Standards 5.1, 5.2, 5.4, 5.5**), high performance roller coasters designed with telementors (**Science Standards 5.2, 5.9**), web design (**Cross Content WPR Standard 2**), analysis of mathematical relationships using graphing calculators (**Cross Content WPR Standards 2 and 3; Math Standards 4.4, 4.5, 4.6**), use of electronic health monitoring equipment (**Cross Content WPR Standard 2; Health and PED Standard 2.6**), and extensive studies of literature and writing that span the breadth of genre and style (**Language Arts and Literacy Standards 3.2 and 3.3**).

As student leaders, the World Game helps them gain an understanding of global harmony and the interdependence of all people by involving students in decision-making that could affect the social, political, and economic conditions of the world. Seventh graders participate in the World Game to simulate international politics on a global scale. Each group of students, representing a world region, negotiates vigorously with international representatives to reach accord on issues confronting the respective regions. The goal for each group is to improve the well being of its own region and others in the world community, without compromising principles of peaceful human relations (**Cross Content WPR Standard 3; Social Studies Standards 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6 and 6.7**).

Community mindedness extends beyond the walls of our school. This year, for example, the eighth grade class planned and developed the "Township Reminiscences Calendar" and "Our Township Virtual

CD-ROM Tour." The calendar involved interviews with over 24 of our town's citizens and resulted in two historical intergenerational calendars heralding the new millennium. The Virtual Tour is widely recognized as the most comprehensive technological resource available in our community. This collaboration involved over 60 eighth grade students and represented their research and technological efforts to design and create an interactive informational CD-ROM that details demographics, school system, and all municipal agencies. In addition, our students and staff are, or have been, actively involved in a number of social service initiatives such as "Make A Difference Day," "Starfish Foundation," "Watershed Clean-Up," "UNICEF Campaign," "Student Ambassadors," and "Save The Children." In 1997 and 1998 our school was recognized by the Disney Corporation as the #1 public school, worldwide, for our UNICEF fundraising efforts **(Cross Content WPR Standard 2)**.

Our young citizens begin to understand that learning is a lifelong, ongoing process, developing skills that they will continue to refine throughout a lifetime. Emphasis is placed on communication, critical thinking, conflict resolution, collaboration, career selection, technology, and health/wellness. Other important programs that promote lifelong learning of our active learners are the Career Games and TEAMS (Targeting Employment Awareness in the Middle School) programs. Career Games guide the students through an assessment of interests, skills, and values, which help them investigate career paths. TEAMS, a Mark of Distinction Grant Winner, sponsored by the County Business Partnership, links their career interest with experience in local industry. **(Cross Content WPR Standard 1)**.

Active learning experiences are at the very heart of our program. Accordingly, our staff places great value on high quality professional growth opportunities which inspire them to create new and exciting experiences for our students.

## **2. Detail to what extent these activities contribute to exemplary teaching practices in their classrooms. Explain the link between these activities and the specialization.**

Our teachers act upon the premise that in order for students to be actively engaged in their learning, they themselves, must be lifelong learners who are critical thinkers, school leaders, and community-minded citizens. The professional development activities in our school provide teachers with the forum for such active learning to occur.

Each year approximately eight shortened session days and three full days of staff development are scheduled into the academic calendar. Coordinated by the district's Director of Curriculum and Instruction and the Staff Development Specialist, The Leader Institute for Continuing Education offers staff the opportunity to take part in courses related to the district's initiatives and areas of interest specified by staff. Continuing education courses, facilitated by our own district staff, utilize a variety of learning strategies: video, teacher sharing, reflection, lesson planning/workshops, peer consultation, discussion, and/or general information sharing. Teachers are also given the opportunity to attend out of district workshops, including conferences provided by New England League of Middle Schools, Classroom Connect, School Wide Enrichment Confratute, The National Science Teachers Association, International Reading Association, National Council of Teachers of English, and the UVA Summer Institute for Academic Diversity.

These professional development opportunities enable teachers to engage in active learning, thereby, extending the active learning practices in their classrooms. Areas of development that have particular impact in classrooms include investigations of differentiated instruction, technology and brain research applications, inquiry- and problem-based learning, and strategies for teaching in the block. In particular, our investigation of differentiation and technology has greatly fostered active learning in our middle school. By practicing differentiated instruction, the statement, "All students can learn," becomes a reality. As a result of our implementations of technology, our students are on the leading edge of technology and are able to use and apply digital equipment, scientific probes, graphing calculators, polar heart monitors, and body mass indices. With over 150 network connected computers available in our building, students are able to publish newspapers, record CDs, research on the Internet, and develop multimedia presentations.

Most importantly, our district has emphasized staff professionalism through its innovative supervision model. Teacher change occurs when teachers engage in self-reflection and ongoing dialogue, make decisions about practices, share knowledge and experience, and understand the relationship among

goals, instruction, and assessment. Staff in our district choose either a traditional observation model of supervision or an alternative experience in which they can investigate action research, develop curriculum projects, participate in collegial partnerships, use interactive journals, assemble portfolios, or act as mentors or peer coaches. As a result of our supervision model, teachers have approached their students with greater cognitive complexity, their instructional practices have changed, and that has affected the breadth, scope, and quality of instruction for our active learners.

**3. Describe the leadership style of the school's administration and how the management and educational program demonstrate administrative and fiscal efficiency. Describe any innovative scheduling and/or management strategies implemented.**

As part of the district leadership team, our principal and vice principal serve as the link between the school board, superintendent, faculty, and community in order to foster a positive learning environment for students. For the past ten years administration has played an integral role in helping our school evolve into a true middle school.

The principal and vice principal, as instructional leaders, continue to pursue our middle school vision by recognizing and valuing the importance of active learning in both their students and their teachers. Together, staff and administration have developed specific strategies to improve our students' learning experience. Teaming is one such strategy. Our school is divided into seven teams, and each team has a leader who meets weekly with the principal and vice principal to address school-wide issues and to keep the lines of communication open. This team leader model is an innovative and collaborative approach to managing a middle school. Since each team of teachers shares the same pool of students, teachers are more capable of effectively meeting the needs of each student. Our schedule is designed to provide teams with a daily common planning time to discuss and brainstorm solutions to issues concerning students. This time is also dedicated toward the development of integrated, thematic, student-centered units. As part of this innovative scheduling, the 90-minute block provides the time necessary for students to be actively involved in their learning and to gain a meaningful understanding of the topics at hand.

Our school is dynamic and our administration encourages both students and teachers to be critical thinkers, creators, and catalysts for change as they promote learning and achievement. The interpersonal skills of administrators and the shared decision-making they employ build morale and encourage growth and creativity. Our supervision model, previously discussed, challenges teachers to take an active role in their professional growth and development and is reflective of the dual leadership role staff and administrators share in creating an effective middle school.

While our achievement ranks among the highest in our DFG, our per pupil cost during the past 3 years has hovered close to the State average for similar enrollment groups. (Source: The New Jersey Department of Education Comparative Spending Guide 2000). Over 79% of the per pupil cost is directed toward classroom instruction, classroom supplies and textbooks, student support services, and extra-curricular activities, while less than 9% of per pupil costs are for administrative salaries and benefits. These numbers have been consistent for the past three years and serve as evidence that our budgets are formulated with instruction and curriculum as our highest priority.

In order to reduce costs, we actively participate in a number of partnerships, which provide support for staff development, furniture and equipment, and human resources. These partnerships include associations with major corporations (Merck and Johnson and Johnson), community and government agencies, and business support services. Our programs continue to thrive and our children achieve at very high levels with minimal state aid. Our state aid falls into three categories, special education, and transportation aid for remote students, and distance learning aid. Since NJ distance learning aid is only a tiny fraction (.5%) of the budgeted resources, we have utilized prudent budgeting and services of community volunteers to expand our technology infrastructure.

Through fiscally efficient management, we have maximized the use of our funds to provide effective educational practices. As a result of our efforts, our taxpayers have endorsed our active learning initiatives by approving the annual school budget.

4. Describe the school's overall approach to assessment. How are your methods aligned to the specialization or whole-school reform model? How are you ensuring that the content you are measuring is consistent with the *Core Curriculum Content Standards*? Provide student performance data for the school years 1998-1999 and 1999-2000 using state tests and, if you wish, national and/or district standardized norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests, and/or alternative assessments. Explain any dramatic increase or decrease. Specify which groups, if any are excluded from the assessments for which you provide data. Give the percentage of students excluded. You may use a chart.

Assessment plays an integral role in the development and success of school programs; it takes on various forms including formal and informal measures, individual and group projects, and standardized and performance-based tasks. It is our assessment measures that most clearly reflect our emphasis on active learning. Students are involved in investigations, problem-based tasks, and research and performance assignments that require them to simulate and demonstrate their understanding in authentic and relevant ways. As examples, performance is measured by portfolios, math journals, lab investigations, multi-media presentations, multi-genre papers, oral presentations, and integrated research papers. As a result, the critical thinking, interpretation, and communication skills that are honed in active learning are evident in student performance across the curriculum.

The results of all forms of assessment are continuously used to evaluate and drive instruction. Utilizing this assessment model, our instructional programs are geared to meet the needs and interests of our students. Criteria for evaluation are clearly delineated and articulated to students and parents prior to learning through the use of rubrics and project guidelines. Because of this clarity, students and parents become a part of the assessment process. Students are also often engaged in self-reflective assessment practices that enable them to gauge and direct their own progress.

Over the past four years our curriculum has been revised based on the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, thereby, ensuring that proficiencies for student achievement at each grade level, instruction that supports these proficiencies, and teacher-designed assessment all directly correlate with these NJ state standards. Proof of this correlation between state standards and our own programming is our continued success on the Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment. Our students achieve at an exceptionally high level and continue to outperform the state average by a substantial margin. Even with high levels of performance, we have continued to show deliberate increases over the past several years. In 1999-2000 the percent of students in the Advanced Proficiency range was almost 5 times better than the State averages on the Language Arts portion, and almost 3 times the State average on the Mathematics portion. All students participate in State-wide assessments.

		Reg Ed	Total Ed*	State Ave	Reg Ed	Total Ed*	State Av
Grade 8 Students		1999-2000	1999-2000	1999-2000	1998-1999	1998-1999	1998-1999
Grade Eight Proficiency Assessment (GEPA)							
Testing month		March	March	March	March	March	March
Number of Students Tested		N=170	N=205		N=189	N=189	
<b>1. LANGUAGE ARTS LITERACY</b>							
Average Score		239.7	234.0		243.3	239.6	
Proficient (200-249)		72.9%	70.7%	76.3%	66.5%	66.1%	71.0%
Advanced Proficiency (250 and above)		26.9%	22.4%	7.4%	33.5%	29.6%	7.0%
<b>Total % Passing</b>		<b>99.4%</b>	<b>93.1%</b>	<b>83.7%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>95.8%</b>	<b>78.0%</b>
<b>2. MATHEMATICS</b>							
Average Score		242.4	235.2		245.3	239.6	
Proficient (200-249)		51.8%	49.8%	47.6%	41.6%	40.2%	46.7%
Advanced Proficiency (250 and above)		41.8%	36.1%	19.7%	53.0%	47.6%	21.8%
<b>Total % Passing</b>		<b>93.6%</b>	<b>85.9%</b>	<b>67.3%</b>	<b>94.6%</b>	<b>87.8%</b>	<b>68.5%</b>

\*Includes Special Education Students

The impact of active learning can, in part, be demonstrated by progressive trends in student achievement on national norm referenced tests. Without appropriate assessment data and the application of such data, we could never have realized our current level of program sophistication or quality of achievement. To gauge student performance in grades 6 and 7, our school utilized the Metropolitan Achievement Test as one measure of assessment. All students participate in standardized assessments.

Metropolitan Achievement Tests 1998-2000	Grade 7		Grade 6	
	1999-2000	1998-1999	1999-2000	1998-1999
Testing month	March	April	March	April
<b>SCHOOL SCORES- Excludes Special Education</b>				
Total or Composite Score	85	84	86	88
Number of Regular Education Students Tested	187	171	177	186
Number of Special Education Students Tested	22	30	19	26
<b>SUBTEST SCORES</b>				
1. Reading – Mean Percentile Rank	78	80	79	79
2. Language – Mean Percentile Rank	82	80	85	88
3. Mathematics – Mean Percentile Rank	86	84	86	89

Though this test data is impressive, we recognize that most standardized tests do not reflect the rigors of our curriculum and the dedication of our staff and students to achieving excellence. Our school has devoted itself to the implementation of the active learning model, and its influence in the past few years has become the catalyst for positive change, improved student achievement, and the development of a school characterized by inquiry, investigation, creativity, and risk-taking.

**5. Describe collaborative efforts with families, business, the community, school districts, and/or higher education that contribute to a school environment governed by the students' needs and promoting high student achievement.**

We take great pride in active steps to "build bridges" with our families, businesses, the broader community, and educational institutions. Such collaboration has often been the impetus for programs that satisfy a variety of student needs and interests, and enhance student achievement. We value

**a "family friendly" school, enhanced by our**

Athletic Booster Club  
Family School Council  
Home and School Cultural Arts Committee  
Home and School Association  
Leaders Club – Vietnam Veteran's Memorial

**strong corporate partnership support from**

Local businesses, "Career Day"  
Community College, "Night Out for Arts"  
Merck Institute for Science Education, "MISE"  
Cerebral Palsy Association, "The Game of Life"  
Rotary Club, "Intergenerational Calendar"  
Johnson and Johnson, Mark of Distinction  
Merck Scientists, "Telementoring"

**activism in the community through our**

Juvenile Conference Committee (Local Police)  
Holocaust Studies (The Community College)  
Community Leaders, "Living History"

Make A Difference Day  
Our Town Virtual Tour  
Starfish Organization (Charitable Funding)  
Student Council  
Teen Arts Festival  
Teens Against Tobacco Use (TATU)  
Watershed Clean-up  
UNICEF (1996-1997)

**student needs governed by school wide enrichment and evidenced by**

After School Clubs (e.g. World Language)  
Athletic Program (70% participation)  
Before and After School Homework Room  
Johns Hopkins Talent Search (ROGATE)  
Peer Leadership (Guidance Department)  
School Newspaper  
"The School ROX" (Music CD)  
Yearbook Staff (Students and Staff)